Social Media as a Method to Inform and Educate the City of Zion

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CERTIFICATION STATEMENT

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed: _____

Abstract

This research was initiated because the Zion Fire and Rescue Department did not have a comprehensive social media plan to inform and educate the community. The purpose of this applied research project was to develop a comprehensive social media plan that the Zion Fire and Rescue Department could use to inform and educate the community. Action research was used to research social media and guide the following questions (a) What laws, rules, and standard operating procedures relate to the use of social media by the Zion Fire and Rescue Department?, (b) What social media systems are available for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department to use?, (c) What information can be put on social media to inform and educate the community?, and (d) Who will maintain and monitor the use of social media by the Zion Fire and Rescue Department?

Social media has been proven successful by both private organizations and public safety entities as a valuable method of distributing a message to large groups of the population.   By using social media as a tool to enhance the public education delivered by the Zion Fire and Rescue Department, information can be delivered to the community improving the risk reduction capabilities of the department.

Through development of policies, a comprehensive social media plan was created for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department to inform and educate the community. It is recommended that the Zion Fire and Rescue Department implement this plan to increase community equity and reduce the risk to the community by disseminating regular information and education through the growing use of social media networks. It is further recommended that the Zion Fire and Rescue Department utilize the social media platforms Facebook and Twitter as their means to deliver this information and education.

Table of Contents

Social Media as a Method to Inform and Educate the City of Zion

The Zion Fire and Rescue Department (ZFRD) is a career staffed department that

provides services relating to fire suppression, advanced life support emergency medical services,

and specialized response teams in addition to public education, fire prevention services and fire

investigation. The majority of the residents, business owners, and elected officials in the City of

Zion have only superficial knowledge of how the ZFRD operates. Most of their knowledge on

the fire service likely comes from what they see on television, read in the paper or see for

themselves through their interactions with the ZFRD. They are aware that the ZFRD responds to

fires, provides advanced life support pre-hospital care, and transports patients to a hospital when

needed. As a community, the residents and business owners know that if they call 911 in need of

the ZFRD's service, the fire department will respond quickly.

Unfortunately, if asked, the community would most likely indicate that the ZFRD

performs as a reactive service rather than a proactive service. The community must be educated

on the full range of services and activities that fire department performs including proactive

services such as preventing fires and injuries through public education, as much as it is

responsible for the reactive services such as responding to calls for assistance.   It is important

for the community to understand how and when we conduct training, the types of public

education programs we deliver, as well as the fire prevention programs we deliver. The ZFRD

needed a way to increase its *community equity* in the City of Zion by becoming more proactive in

the community through its ability to inform and educate the community in the areas of fire and

life safety prevention, fire department operations, and incident information. An end result of this

proactive approach to providing information and education to the community would be an

increased awareness of the ZFRD by the residents and business owners in the city of Zion. This

increased awareness could lead to additional support which could become valuable in times of

budget concerns or budget cutbacks affecting the community directly. Michael Chiaramonte

(2006) stated it best when he said,

> Fire Departments must make sure that their communities are well-informed of every
>
> aspect of the fire department, including a complete knowledge of what occurs at the fire
>
> station on a daily basis by the entire staff. More importantly, the community must know
>
> why these activities occur and what effect they have on providing safety and security.
>
> (p. 36-37)

The problem is the ZFRD does not have a comprehensive social media plan to inform

and educate the community.   Budget cuts, including personnel reductions, have reduced the

ZFRD's capability to provide direct public education programs to the community. Through the

use of social media, the ZFRD can reach more of the public than it ever could previously to

provide fire and life safety education and to provide information of interest to the community on

fire department activities and operations. The use of social media has become another facet of

marketing and customer service. Further, people are beginning to expect organizations and

businesses to use social media tools (Holdeman, 2011).

The purpose of this applied research project was to develop a comprehensive social

media plan to inform and educate the community. Times have changed and the fire service must

find better ways to get their safety messages and information out to the community. Traditional

methods of communicating information and education to the public are quickly being replaced

by the internet and the use of social media and social networking sites. As society becomes a

world driven and informed by technology, the fire service needs to accept and approach social

media as a viable means of communicating with the public.

Through a review of (a) publications, (b) books, (c) journals, (d) electronic media, and (e) prior research pertaining to the fire service and corporate sector's use of social media, this applied research project looked into how social media can be used to inform and educate the citizens served by the ZFRD. Action research was the methodology used to research social media and guide the following questions (a) What laws, rules, and standard operating procedures relate to the use of social media by the Zion Fire and Rescue Department?, (b) What social media systems are available for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department to use?, (c) What information can be put on social media to inform and educate the community?, and (d) Who will maintain and monitor the use of social media by the Zion Fire and Rescue Department?

Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube have become part of our daily lives and are providing public safety agencies with a new ways of communicating with the public. Through this action research project, a comprehensive social media program and policy was developed to enable the ZFRD to take advantage of this technology and increase its capability to inform and educate a larger segment of the population and become a more proactive segment of the community.

Background and Significance

The City of Zion is located in northeastern Lake County, Illinois approximately 40 miles north of Chicago, Illinois and 40 miles south of Milwaukee, Wisconsin along the western shores of Lake Michigan. The population of Zion in July 2009 was approximately 25,206 within boundaries that comprised 8.2 square miles. Within these boundaries are approximately 8,682 housing units (City-Data, n.d.). Zion was rooted as a religious community, organized by John Alexander Dowie in 1902 and is mix of older residential Victorian style homes, newer homes, commercial and industrial occupancies.

Two major railroads run through the City of Zion. One railroad, the Northern Union Pacific, is located on the east side of town and primarily runs commuter and freight trains. The commuter trains run a regular schedule daily providing multiple trips between Chicago and Kenosha, Wisconsin. A Central Pacific railway runs on the far west edge of town running several freight trains per day. The residential, commercial and industrial occupancies that are protected by the ZFRD range from low-hazard to high-hazard, and each offer varying hazards to the community.

Zion's largest employer, Midwestern Regional Medical Center is the headquarters for the Cancer Treatment Centers of America. Midwestern Regional Medical Center treats approximately 2700 outpatients and 600 inpatients from across the country each month with a staff of 900 employees (Cancer Treatment Centers of America, 2011). While in the City of Zion, outpatients stay at Midwestern Regional Medical Center's two Guest Quarters facilities located in town as well as two of the local hotels, Country Inn and Suites and Best Western. The Commonwealth Edison Nuclear Generating Station is another high-hazard occupancy that made its home in Zion for 37 years. Although it was closed in 1998, no longer produces power, and is in the process of being decommissioned, it still contains radioactive rods that will remain onsite for up to 100 years (Long & Hinkel, 2010). It is estimated that the process of dismantling and decommissioning the plant, which began in October 2010, could take up to 10 years and employ 200 to 400 employees daily. Each of these hazards creates a potential for risk that the community may not be aware of. With the changing population based on patients coming in and out of Midwestern Regional Medical Center, the ability to keep patients informed and educated to the community was seen as a necessity by the ZFRD.

The ZFRD is staffed by 23 sworn personnel including (a) a fire chief, (b) a part time civilian fire marshal, and (c) two part-time administrative assistants. There are 22 personnel assigned to one of three shifts, which are assigned a 24-hour on and 48-hour off schedule operating out of two stations to maintain a daily minimum staffing of six personnel. Two shifts consist of seven personnel and one shift consists of eight. Each shift has a battalion chief as the shift commander and a lieutenant as the assistant shift commander. Station one, the headquarters station, houses an engine staffed with the shift commander and engineer as well as an ambulance staffed with two firefighter/paramedics. Station two houses a quint with a 105' ladder and an ambulance. These two apparatus are staffed by a jump company of two personnel, one of which is the assistant shift commander.   A jump company is defined as a crew that jumps to either the ambulance or the quint depending on the nature of the call.

The ZFRD provides prevention and protection to the City of Zion through a variety of services, The services provided by the ZFRD include but are not limited to: (a) fire suppression, (b) advanced life support (ALS) treatment and transport, (c) technical rescue, (d) water rescue, (e) hazardous materials response, (f) fire prevention, (g) public education, and (h) all other related services needed to support the City of Zion in an emergency incident. The fire prevention bureau is led by the fire marshal who is responsible for (a) code enforcement, (b) plan reviews, (c) assigning shift inspection, and (d) inspecting occupancies not conducted by the shifts.

Despite the recent decline in the economy, the City of Zion's Economic Development Committee has been able to attract developers and business owners to Zion causing a steady growth in residential, commercial, and industrial occupancies. As the City of Zion continued to grow over the years, it yielded a rise in call volume and activities, but despite this increased need

for staffing to match the growth, personnel have been lost through attrition due to fiscal concerns

dropping from 26 sworn personnel in 2008 to its current level of 23. When the City determined

the budget for the ZFRD needed to be cut, it was the personnel that were the first to go. This

was followed by programs that do not directly affect the day-to-day operations of the fire

department, such as public education and fire prevention. The ZFRD attempted to continue its

delivery of public education programs and fire prevention programs as it had in the past, but an

increase in call volume did not allow the ZFRD to maintain the frequency and quality of these

programs.

The ZFRD uses Firehouse Software as a database for recording incident information. A

review of records shows that in 2001 the department responded to 2485 calls for service

compared to 3422 calls for service in 2010. This reflected a 37.07% increase over the time

period with a minimum daily staffing level that was equal to what it was as far back as the mid

80's.

The ZFRD had attempted to improve community education through the addition of

public programs conducted by on-duty shift personnel such as (a) public education of fire and

life safety for the local school system and civic groups, (b) CPR and first aid training for the

public, (c) fire extinguisher training for city businesses, (d) car seat safety checks, and (e)

juvenile firesetter intervention programs. The ZFRD has also made itself available for safety

talks, block party appearances, and other public education or relations programs as requested by

individuals or organizations. Shift personnel are also responsible for conducting fire inspections

of businesses and apartments within the City of Zion, which are scheduled by the part-time fire

marshal. The increase in call volume and shift related activities have led to a reduction in the

amount of resources and time that can be dedicated to providing public education to the

community. Resources must now be directed to maintaining daily operations and incident

response.

The daily operations of the fire service have always been a bit of a mystery to the general

public. If we are not responding to incidents, the public assumes we are waxing vehicles, sitting

down and watching TV or playing checkers. The ZFRD has not been proactive in the

community by keeping citizens informed of what comprises our daily operations. Much of the

community was not aware of how we operated and what we had to offer besides emergency

responses. The rapport required for strong community support in the event of budget cutbacks

was not evident in Zion.

The majority of community wide public education was a once a year event wrapped

around fire prevention week in October. The Zion Fire and Rescue Department traditionally

provided fire and life safety education primarily to young children through the schools during

fire prevention week. An open house was held during that same month to provide additional

time for the dissemination of information to children and adults as well as an opportunity to

allow the public inside the firehouse to see the apparatus and living quarters and to ask questions.

Although actual numbers were not tracked, it appeared that over the last several years the crowd

attending the open house has decreased. In conjunction, with the lack of funding to pay overtime

to staff the open house, hours have had to be reduced. This was the beginning of what led the

ZFRD to begin to look at better ways to provide information and education to the public.

Aside from the annual fire prevention week open house, the ZFRD didn't seem to be

doing a good job of proactively promoting the prevention side of the fire service. The ZFRD

always honored requests for group tours of the firehouse, safety talks for organizations, and

public relation related events for residents, businesses and organizational groups located in the

City of Zion. The ZFRD needed to become more active and transparent to the City of Zion offering them a chance to see and hear from the fire department on a regular basis as a proactive organization rather than simply at a time of need. As the Fire Chief for the ZFRD, the author realized that the fire department had to find a better way to show the residents and business owners of the City of Zion that there was an interest in promoting safety, making them aware of how we operate, and providing for a greater community risk reduction. In addition, to gain *community equity,* a means of allowing the community to interact with ZFRD on a regular basis needed to be created. In short, the ZFRD had to look to different and more efficient methods to regularly provide information and education in a manner that was readily accessible to the community and would be relative to their interest or needs.

There are a number of potential avenues for public education, each with significant limitations. The ZFRD's staffing levels do not allow for the position of a full time public education coordinator. In order to provide coordination of public education, this position is managed by a shift lieutenant who works a 24-hour on 48-hour off shift and is primarily responsible for company level firefighting and EMS. The lieutenant promotes public education by coordinating (a) public requests for appearances, (b) first aid and safety talks, (c) tours, (d) other education tasks as necessary. In addition, this position coordinates the annual Fire Prevention Week open house each October. The public education coordinator also works closely with the webmaster of the official City of Zion website to keep the information on the fire department section up to date with current information deemed of interest to the community. The official City of Zion website is managed by an outside vendor and not through the City itself. Although not a critical factor in getting information posted, this lack of internal control prevents the ZFRD from having the ability to quickly add or delete information on the website.

The Zion-Benton News, the area's free weekly newspaper, has been used regularly by the ZFRD to promote items of interest to the community based on seasonal dangerous such as fireworks, Christmas trees and carbon monoxide dangers. It is also used to post items of interest to the community involving ZFRD activities and events. Use of this resource comes at no cost to the ZFRD.

The ZFRD sent two of its officers, one battalion Chief and one lieutenant, to training to serve in the capacity as the ZFRD's public information officer (PIO). Although assigned, these individuals are not used in their PIO capacity. When a large incident occurs, the shift commander creates a press release that is e-mailed to area newspapers, radio station and television news stations. The fire chief was typically contacted by the media for follow up incident information. If the fire chief was not available, the shift commander would provide information based on the facts available at the time of the request. If the media requested information from the ZFRD for a non-incident event or activity, the fire chief served as the point of contact. The fire chief would, at his discretion, then delegate responsibility for notifying the media to the officer responsible for public education.

Over the last decade, there have been many changes in the technology available for society to communicate. Social media, like print, broadcast, or radio, is one such medium of communication that has risen from current technologies (Agresta & Bough, 2011). According to Coyle and Meier (2009), the growth in the use of mobile phones has been strong along with the use of social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Traditional methods of informing the public, such as newspapers, are not as effective as they have been in the past. People are referring to electronic media more than print media these days for gaining their information. The use of iPads, smartphones, and other portable devices make accessing news and information

from anyplace and anytime the norm. Internet access to global electronic information and to

social networking media has revolutionized information sharing. These networking capabilities

are changing the way we communicate with each other (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010). Social media

provides a method to deliver education and inform the public in ways that brochures, newsletters

and traditional methods cannot. Social media allows a person to deliver a message quickly to

one person or a group of persons without having to wait for a publication date, reporter's

interview or other traditional media delays. The shift from one-to-many forms of

communication, such as television and radio, to many-to-many forms of communication, such as

social networking, is changing the way information is delivered and exchanged (Coyle & Meier,

2009).

A major portion of the *Executive Analysis of Community Risk Reduction* course held at

the National Fire Academy and attended by the author as part of the Executive Fire Officer

Program dealt with gaining community equity and improving community risk reduction.

Through an interactive use of social media, the Zion Fire and Rescue Department hoped to

become proactive and gather community equity while promoting knowledge in the areas of fire

and injury prevention to the community. An example of a proactive message could be a fire

prevention or public education announcement during the winter season regarding space heater

use. Another example may relate to fireworks safety around the July 4th holiday.

According to May (2008), the fire rescue service historically informs the public by

delivering information through various forms of media. May suggested that this cooperative use

of the media is one of the most significant methods we have in getting our point across en masse.

With the growing trend of social media as a means to get messages out and interact with the

public, the ZFRD saw this as a viable means of increasing its ability to inform and educate the

community. With the growing number of social media sites available, the ZFRD would have to

decide which social media site(s) would allow for the greatest amount of the community to have

access to the information and education disseminated by the ZFRD

Social media is just another tool that fire departments such as the ZFRD can use to keep

on the edge of cutting technology. This technology would increase the awareness of the ZFRD

by delivering information on a regular basis and on a variety of topics. The goal of using social

media would be to spread the information to the community through social media sites in hopes

that members of the community would then forward them on to their own social media contacts.

The use of social networking would allow the ZFRD to spread their word as far as their social

media followers would allow. With the time and resources available for the ZFRD to provide

public education, alternatives such as social media gives the fire department an opportunity to

stay visible in the public's eye with maximum impact, and not just during emergencies (May,

2008).   The ZFRD felt that it was time to become more accessible to the community and that the

best method to initiate this would be to reach the community through their through their

increasing method of communication, social media. Social media sites such as (a) Facebook, (b)

Twitter, (c) MySpace, and (d) LinkedIn among others are providing platforms that are used by

members of the general public everyday to communicate with each other and keep up with the

activities of private organizations. Since many of the members of the ZFRD have their own

personal social media accounts, it seemed natural to approach social media as the method to

inform and educate the community.

The problem the ZFRD faced was not having a comprehensive social media plan to

inform and educate the community. The goal was to establish a comprehensive social media

plan that would allow the ZFRD to keep the City of Zion informed and educated. The Executive

Analysis of Community Risk Reduction (NFA, 2011) course materials distributed as part of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program was designed to establish a national focus on community risk reduction (SM I-3). This applied research project is relevant to the curriculum taught in the Executive Fire Officer Program, Executive Analysis of Community Risk Reduction, in particular the units covering program design and evaluation as well as leading organizational and community change. To be successful, the creation of a comprehensive social media plan for the ZFRD would have to be designed for success in mind. The plan would have to be designed around the community's interests, ease of access and participation. This plan would also need to be evaluated periodically to verify that the goal of becoming proactive and distributing useful inform and education was being accomplished.

The research conducted for this applied research project enabled the author to develop a comprehensive social media plan for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department that will provide a means to inform and educate the public as well as a means to increase public relations between the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and the City of Zion. By assessing and developing a social media program for disseminating information and education to the public, this applied research project links to the United States Fire Administration's operational goals: (a) to reduce risk at the local level through prevention and mitigation, (b) improve local planning and preparedness, and (c) improve the fire and emergency services' professional status (USFA, 2010).

Literature Review

A definition of social media is a medium that uses web 2.0 technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogs. Web 2.0 technologies are defined as web applications that facilitate participatory information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the internet (Wikipedia, 2011b). Social media are media for social interaction,

using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. The term refers to the use of

web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue (Wikipedia,

2011a). Traditional forms of communication are usually one sided and intended only to offer

information to the receiver. Social media on the other hand allows for participation by all that

receive the information; the information is typically visible to a larger group and the receivers

are allowed and encouraged to share the information to members of their own network. This

widespread delivery of information would allow the ZFRD to deliver its message to more people

than it could through traditional methods. The ability to receive interaction through members of

the social network would allow the ZFRD to evaluate the participation and the quality of

information in ways it could not before.

People obtain their information, education, news and other data from electronic media

and print media. Social media are distinct from industrial or traditional media, such as

newspapers, television, and film. They are relatively inexpensive and accessible to enable

anyone to publish or access information, compared to industrial media, which generally require

significant resources to publish information (Wikipedia, 2011a). Accounts on social media sites

are free to set up and operate. They are also an effective means of communicating because they

are easily accessible through computers and data-enabled cell phones known as smartphones.

The growth of mobile phones has been one of the most remarkable features of the last decade

(Coyle & Meier, 2009). Mobile telephones have become a key fixture in the lives of nearly

everyone in the United States, and increasingly so, the world. For the majority, mobile phones

are more than just a tool for making phone calls. The increasingly widespread use mobile and

online technology presents new ways for information to spread both among members of the

community and the general public. This can be helpful to the ZFRD when promoting public

education and prevention messages as well as during emergencies when the dissemination of

critical information is vital to the safety of the public. The potential for use of communication

before, during, and after natural disasters or conflicts has been enhanced thanks to the advent of

new technologies such as mobile phones and the internet (Coyle & Meier, 2009). Fire and life

safety is not solely a fire department responsibility but rather a responsibility that requires

community wide action (Powell, 2010).

Most social media sites consist of members that are connected through a variety of

interests. These members are connected to other members creating a large database of users

available to be reached through the posting of just one message. When this message is posted on

a profile page, friends have the option of reposting the message to other friends, which starts a

chain of dissemination unavailable through traditional media. Social media is not really a new

technology. It is the current technology that has made social media the phenomenon it is through

accessibility. While it has only recently become part of mainstream culture and the business

world, people have been using digital media for networking, socializing and information

gathering, almost exactly like now, for over 30 years (Borders, 2009). As Evans (2008) stated

"the social web, as it expands and exerts itself over at least a portion of contemporary marketing,

is driving interconnectedness to new levels" (p. 27).

Early social media systems included (a) bulletin board systems, (b) phone "Phreaking",

and (c) online services such as Prodigy and Compuserve that offered opportunities for

individuals to network and socialize similar to what social media does today. Friendster and

MySpace, both developed in 2003, led the surge into what we now know as social media

platforms (Borders, 2009). The key concept of social media is that it is shared with those that

you identify as friends or followers. This is an inner circle that you have opted in to view any

content or information you opt to share, thereby making it the act of being social online (Agresta

& Bough, 2011). Items that take place on the social web include (a) information, (b) news, (c)

communications, (d) entertainment, (e) services, and (f) business.

       Social media is a progressive form of information dissemination. Fire departments that

participate in social media can be seen as proactive in their community while becoming

transparent. Frequent communication with followers can be an empowering byproduct of social

media technology. Social media can provide unique marketing ideas for the fire service, which

force fire departments to revisit core guiding principles of providing new ways to reach out to the

public to deliver fire and life safety education and information.

       The four major social network platforms are (a) Facebook, (b) Twitter, (c) MySpace, and

(d) YouTube. This is based on size and growth rate. When you are marketing to a mass market

audience, you simply cannot ignore these platforms (Singh, 2010). YouTube is a free video

sharing platform that allows individuals or organizations to upload, share and view videos.   The

fire service commonly uses YouTube to share training videos and public education videos.

Viewers may post comments on the video, "like" the video, and share the video. MySpace is a

free online community aimed mostly at a younger membership that is composed of personal

profiles that include digital photos and in-depth information about personal interests. The amount

of detail included in the profile is up to the user and submitted voluntarily.

       Facebook and Twitter with their ability to be interactive have become the major

platforms used by the fire service and private organizations. During research on the internet, a

search of key words such as "fire department" resulted in links to many fire departments in the

country hosting a Facebook and or a Twitter account.

Facebook was founded in February 2004 as a social utility to help people communicate efficiently with their friends, family and coworkers (Factsheet, 2011). Since 2004, Facebook has acquired more than 500 million active users. In any given day, 50% of active users log on to Facebook, and the average user has 130 friends. People spend over 700 billion minutes per month on Facebook. The average user is connected to 80 community pages, groups, and events. There are more than 250 million active users currently accessing Facebook through their mobile devices (Statistics, 2011). Facebook, through the development of an individual's or organization's profile page, can allow the posting of messages, events, videos and photos. Through Facebook, one can insert links to web pages, blogs, or videos directly onto their profile page. Gillin and Schwartzman (2011) call Facebook the ultimate word of mouth marketing system. Facebook page administrators may communicate only with members that register their interest. Members vote their approval by using the "like" button. Member's activities are automatically shared with their social network on an updated news feed. Members can also recommend a page to their friends requesting them to join (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011).

Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, informally known as "tweets." Twitter was created in March 2006 and later launched in July of that year. Twitter rapidly gained worldwide popularity (Wikipedia, 2011c). According to Wikipedia (2011c), Twitter has acquired 200 million users as of 2011, generating over 200 million tweets and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day. Gillin and Schwartzman (2011) propose that Twitters' 140 character limit is often perceived as a limitation; however, it is actually a virtue because it's easier to come up with 140 characters than it is to write a blog post (2011). As Singh (2010) indicated, everyday more people create Twitter accounts than any other social platform. Singh

also goes on to state that most Twitter users are typically older than their Facebook counterparts.

Twitter is basically a powerful mobile social network that enables you to keep up with the

people, businesses and organizations your interested in, whether you know them or not (Fitton,

Gruen, & Posten, 2009). Fitton et al. (2009) also identify that Twitter allows sharing what you

are doing with the world, everyone from your family and friends to complete strangers. The

biggest asset of Twitter is the sheer mass of everyday people who want to share their thoughts,

spread the news, and network. Many private organizations have found Twitter as a way to build

awareness of their brand name, strengthen relationships with customers and provide better

customer service (Fitton et al., 2009). The ability to build awareness of the fire service and

strengthen the relationships with the residents and business owners in the City of Zion is one of

the reasons the ZFRD was looking at developing a social media plan. Mazzarella mentions that

one of the fastest growing social networking utilities is Twitter, which offers public safety

organizations a powerful and effective communications utility to add to their tool chest (2009).

Mazzarella goes on to suggest that it is likely that Twitter can and will be used by innovative

agencies as a means to enhance information gathering through public participation, enabling

"virtual neighborhood watch" capabilities.

Twitter differs from Facebook in that Facebook status updates are broadcasted to friends

and those permitted to view the profile. On Twitter, by default, updates are shared with the

world (Fitton et al., 2009). Facebook's security controls on the other hand allow only those

members that have been given permission by the host to view the content on the page (Factsheet,

2011). Like Facebook, on Twitter you can insert links to web pages, blogs, or other tweets

directly into your tweet. Through the use of websites, such as Google alerts and twialert.com,

users can keep track of the activity on their social media sites through the use of key word

searches. These sites allow users to type in specific key words as a search option. Any time their key words are accessed an alert is sent to the individual.   Whether you are convincing yourself or someone else that social influence marketing is an important project, a good first step is to measure social activity on the web (Singh, 2010). By typing in key words such as Zion Fire and Rescue, the ZFRD can track the amount of times their social media sites are being accessed.

It must be mentioned that the social networking applications people are using to communicate with are not an authenticated platform. Platforms that are not authenticated can be accessed by anyone and are not secure. Nixle is a public safety application that can be offered to the general public and uses the same secure networks used by law enforcement agencies across America (Leggiere, 2009). Nixle's emergency officials log in and send messages securely. Messages are then sent via e-mail, text message, and web page updates to those who have requested to receive updates (Leggiere, 2009).

Through the literature review it was discovered that social media is becoming the norm for information dissemination information in this age of technology. The corporate world has discovered that social media is the newest form of marketing their businesses. The fire service must begin to look at this form of information media to spread the word of fire and life safety education as resources are lost during budget cutbacks.

Public safety education programs are part of the essential services that are or should be delivered by every fire and rescue organization. These programs are the proactive programs that serve to instruct citizens in actions that will prevent loss or injury according to Barr, Eversole, Bennett, Brunacini, and Coleman (2003). Public safety education programs are those that seek to prevent injury or loss through programs that are educational, instructional, or informative on a wide range of issues that the fire rescue organization is responsible for (Barr et al., 2003).

The use of social media is an emerging field that is growing in the business world as a method of marketing. By comparison, the ZFRD will essentially be marketing its public education services through social media. More and more people look to social media sites for their news than they do to newspapers and television. Municipalities are discovering that social media sites are a better and faster method for keeping in touch with their citizens and to provide timely information on the daily operations of the city. According to McGoldrick (2010), one of the biggest uses of social media for the fire department is community outreach. McGoldrick suggests that social media can be used to help the public better understand fire safety and the role of the fire department (2010). Fire departments must become more adaptable to using social media as a means of communication. It provides a great opportunity for interaction with the community.

Recent history has shown that the City of Zion has seen a spurt in residential growth, as well as an increase in commercial and industrial developments. This growth has had a positive impact for the City of Zion but a negative impact on ZFRD in terms of increased call volumes and non-incident activities. As Barr et al. (2003) pointed out, "The expectation of the modern fire department, like most government agencies, is to do more with less. Budgets, and subsequently the number of personnel, have not grown at a rate equal to local population growth and demand for services" (p. 15). The adaptability of social media to media platforms, such as video and photos has allowed departments and associations to share important information with communities in a cost-effective way. This makes social media an ideal solution for fire departments with limited budgets and those looking for better ways to communicate with the public (McGoldrick, 2010).

Municipalities, like corporations, are learning that social media sites can open up new methods for the residents of the community to learn about the services they provide. The ZFRD needed to take advantage of this technology to gain the support and trust of the community in ways it didn't have before. Martha Jack (as cited in McGoldrick, 2010) stated, "I think municipalities are really missing the boat with social media, it's a great opportunity to listen to what the public has to say and build relationships with them" (p. 31).

Communication with the public is a signature accomplishment for most public safety and emergency management organizations (Werner, 2011). Campion (2010) suggests that the fire service is not communicating the way we should be with the public. The true mission of the fire service is to not have the trucks leave the station and that the only way we can accomplish this is through a change in human behavior. He goes on further to say that we can change this behavior by engaging people on the web. According to Campion (2010), "Our safety messages belong where our citizens are spending their time, and these days, that's on Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc." (p. 6).

After setting up social media sites, organizations should accept friends and follower requests, seek out others that share interests, and interact regularly with friends and followers. A friend could become an on-scene observer who could relay life saving information during an incident, or may be able to re-tweet your injury prevention message, exponentially increasing its impact (Friese, 2009). The use of social media on a regular basis can provide credibility to an organization when it is need most. Social authority is developed when an individual or organization establishes themselves as an "expert" in their given field or area, thereby becoming an influence in that field or area (Wikipedia, 2011a). The goal is to be helpful to others, to the general public; the fire service is seen as an expert in their field (Barszczewski, 2011).

Fire service websites are not restricted to firefighters. They can be and often are frequented by the media, the legal profession and the public. The thought is that once you publish information, you immediately become a source. Furey (2003) stated that anything placed on the web with or without disclaimers, can be as powerful as any official statement made by a public information officer. A social media strategy should leverage expertise and the expertise of those in an organization (Safko, 2009).

There are two forms of mobile marketing according to Singh (2003), direct and indirect. Direct marketing reaches out to a customer through their mobile device where indirect marketing requires you to seek obtain permission from the people to contact them. Fire departments should consider what information to share with the public and the community and how to do so effectively. To be effective at mobile marketing using social media, an organization must offer a service that allows feedback of content and allows the user to share ideas. Further, the organization must get the community to learn more and to share these learning experiences with others.

The greatest success with the use of social media can be seen in the private industry. Private organizations have watched this increase in use of social media by the general public. Corporations and business that used to rely solely on traditional methods of advertising are now turning to social media because of the vast amount of people that can be reached and the speed of which information can be spread. Success in marketing by these organizations can be measured by the number of *friends*, *likes*, *visits*, or *followers* on their sites. With the number of private organizations now using social media for marketing, it is safe to assume that the fire service can also utilize these forms of media to market the fire department by broadening the opportunities

available to inform and educate the community. With this is mind, many private organizations

have formed social media sites to engage the public in their business or product.

Social media is one of the fastest growing modes of communication ever developed, and

the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is hopping on the bandwagon in using social

media to promote its message. To NFPA officials, it made sense to reach people where they are-

-on the internet--and use that as a vehicle to convey their fire safety and prevention messages.

They recommend fire departments do the same (Ballum, 2011). Even the Department of

Homeland Security is using social media to share information and engage with the public

(Department Homeland Security, 2011).

Some of the newest additions to the public safety education arsenal are the fire and rescue

organization websites (Barr et al., 2003). A little web surfing will reveal that quite a number of

fire and rescue organizations throughout North America are providing a range of public safety

education materials that can be accessed through their websites (Barr et al., 2003). The Boston

Fire Department, Boston, MA, has implemented a Facebook page with great success. A

Facebook page can rate its success by the number of fans, people or groups that established an

online relationship with the page, it acquires. The Boston Fire Department's Facebook page

gathered more than 10,000 fans in its first 6 months of existence. This statistic was valuable in

proving the success of social media in reaching large amounts of people in a short amount of

time (McCourt, 2010). An example of the success of their use of social media could be seen with

their annual campaign to have people change their smoke detector batteries when they change

their clocks. The Boston Fire Department posted this on Facebook and Twitter and received

more than 17,000 views. The Garden City, Kansas Police Department uses Twitter as a free

public messaging tool to send out information on events, missing persons, and other community

advisories (Mazzarella, 2009). Another example is the Houston Fire Department who uses

Twitter to describe incidents as they are occurring. The Los Angeles Emergency Management

Department's (EMD) use of social media reflects a growing trend among public safety agencies

to utilize social media to connect with the public. This is occurring because the public is now

spending more time gathering information from social media sites than traditional media sites

such as television, radio and newspapers (Hendrix, 2011). The Los Angeles Twitter account was

ultimately "verified" by Twitter, a distinction Twitter carefully dispenses to establish authenticity

so users can trust that a legitimate source is authoring the tweets (Hendrix, 2011).

Prior to setting up a social media site, the ZFRD must identify the needs of the

community and develop the site around those needs. As technology advances, the utilization of

new communication methods can help the important message of safety reach more people more

effectively (Mathis & Galloway, 2010). Integration is the key to promoting social media

channels when interacting with the community on traditional channels (Ressler, 2011). Agresta

and Bough (2011) advise that maintaining an effective presence on social media requires a lot

more than simply keeping a Facebook or Twitter account.   An organization must first define its

audience and its audience's needs. One of the challenges of social media is that once you get

good at it, it's harder to keep up with your need to create content (Agresta & Bough, 2011).

Time must be devoted to social media each day to keep it interesting to your followers and

friends. Social media communication is about building strategic alliances, about relationships

(Barszczewski, 2011). For those interested in more timely methods of mass communication,

social media tools can be very effective. Just be aware of your audience and the information you

are sharing (Niebur, 2011). Lightweight and simple interactions on social media can generate a

greater engagement (Agresta & Bough, 2011). The effectiveness of social media depends on

activities that your audience is interested in or is receptive to (Evans, 2008). Evans goes on to

stress that the use of social media is intended to complement your current efforts not replace

them. Once the decision is made to use social media as a marketing and education tool, one must

agree to always be real and transparent, be interesting, build a community and add value

(Agresta & Bough, 2011). When an organization first establishes a presence in social

networking, it is like any other newcomer and will need to methodically build an online

reputation (Evans, 2008).

Growing a community of people who want to connect with your organization could prove

invaluable during a major incident (Friese, 2009). Friese goes on to say that to use social

networking effectively for mass notifications during a large incident, fire departments need to (a)

be familiar with social media content creation, (b) establish a social network presence, (c)

regularly distribute content to develop an audience and establish expertise, and (d) develop

relationships with key constituencies like local media, government leaders, bloggers, and

interested citizens. Along with the benefits of social media, the ZFRD must be cautious with the

information that is allowed to be placed on the sites as well as who places the information on the

site.

Consultants suggest that organizations such as fire departments create a social media plan

to ensure proper use of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn. These plans may include

information about appropriate content, user and administrative rights and office protocol. These

guidelines can ensure the quality and relevance of information (McGoldrick, 2010). McGoldrick

goes on to indicate that many workplaces discourage employees from using Facebook when they

are on the job. Many Canadian fire departments, on the other hand, have embraced social media

as an effective and efficient tool to communicate with residents, raise money, launch recruitment

drives and spread information about local emergencies.

Technology is now moving faster than our brain and sometimes faster than facts will

allow. The only think more devastating is the public relations nightmare and possible lawsuits

created from the use of technology to spread information (Denniston, 2010). Posting comments

on Facebook or other social media sites looks a lot more like saying something on television than

having a private conversation. It can be seen by millions of people and a permanent record of

what was said is created. That is hardly a private conversation or even a conversation in a

crowded bar after work (Varone, 2011). A municipal firefighter's right to free speech under the

first amendment cannot be infringed upon by an employer (Varone, 2011). The National Labor

Relations Act (NRLA) protects the rights of all employees to discuss wages, working conditions,

and terms of employment as long as it does not cause actual harm or disruption to the operations

of his or her employer. Employee's Facebook posts or other online communications may be

protected under the NRLA (Erickson, 2010). According to Varone (2011), this right applies only

applies to matters of public concern. Comments that are in the nature of a private grievance are

not entitled to first amendment protection.

Neither the City of Zion, nor any department within the City, had a social media policy.

Employees with internet access were given the opportunity to access social media sites through

their private accounts while at work. Zion Fire and Rescue Department employees could

regularly be seen on Facebook and Twitter during breaks and after hours. The only regulation

relating to the use of social media was in the form of the City Of Zion Internet Policy.   This

policy advised the employees that the networks and computers used were the property of the City

of Zion. Any use of the computers and networks were considered City business and was subject

to review. Employees were allowed to access personal social media sites using City of Zion

computers during breaks and after 4:00pm as long as it did not interfere with normal operations.

Care must be taken to monitor the information that is placed on social media websites.

Organizations need to create a social media spokesperson to control the information that is being

delivered. As much as we wish to remain transparent and keep the community informed, too

much information can often be trouble. Be aware that there are people out there looking to use

social media to target or collect personal information for criminal reasons (Department

Homeland Security, 2011). Additionally, posting pictures or information regarding incidents can

lead to a rapid dissemination of information before we may be ready. As Wilmoth stated, while

newspapers and television news will hold the name of victims pending notification of the family

members, smartphones put the grapevine or phone tree on steroids (2010). Provide access to

social media sites and set use policies, as well as provide social media updates in your annual

ethics and security trainings (Ressler, 2011). Firms should embrace social networking early on

and work on the information risk and security management requirements.

Involvement in the technology of social media is now an expectation by almost everyone.

Requests for e-mail addresses, social media sites, and websites are all frequently asked for by

people and businesses we interact with. Electronic devices are now must haves for everyone and

are commonly seen being carried by many people. Fire departments should not be afraid to

embrace social media and social networking as part of their public education and marketing

process. They can find that community equity can be gained by interacting with the community

on a regular basis and not just when an emergency occurs. As Mazzarella (2009) pointed out,

thousands of eyes and typing hands can provide important information to public safety agencies

during local incidents or natural disasters. If the ZFRD wants to stay ahead of the technology

and serve its community in the most aggressive way possible, it must embrace social media as a

method of delivering information to the community.

<div align="center">**Procedures**</div>

The procedures for this applied research project were initiated by the development of a

problem statement, a purpose for the research, and a series of questions intended to guide the

research. Research was conducted to gather information that would be used to develop a

comprehensive social media plan for the ZFRD to inform and educate the community. The

procedures for this project consisted of a comprehensive literature review that was conducted to

determine the background of social media and how it is being used. Specifically, the literature

review was concentrated on social media's recent adaptation to providing information and

education to members of the general public and how social media can be used to inform and

educate the community through the development of a comprehensive social media plan.

A portion of the literature review was conducted at the Learning Resource Center (LRC)

at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland while attending the Executive Analysis

of Community Risk Reduction course March 7-18, 2011. After returning home, additional

literature review was conducted at the John C. Murphy Memorial Library on the campus of the

College of Lake County in Grayslake, Illinois and the Zion-Benton Public Library in Zion,

Illinois. Through the interlibrary loan process, several resources were requested from the LRC

and delivered to the Zion-Benton Public Library for review.

Numerous (a) periodicals, (b) books, (c) publications, (d) internet blogs and (e) Executive

Fire Officer applied research papers were found and reviewed through the use of on-site card

catalogs, online card catalogs and the internet using key word searches such as, but not limited to

(a) social media, (b) social media types, (c) social media networking, (d) social media marketing,

(e) fire department use of social media, (f) social media laws and policies, and (g) public

education.   While conducting the literature review, the majority of sources found related to

either social media's use in the corporate world or the use of social media as a personal

communications tool. Only three Executive Fire Officer applied research papers were found that

has a direct relationship to the use of social media to inform and educate the community. Several

additional applied research projects were found that mentioned social media as a method of

emergency notification. Many fire service related sources reviewed dealt with the emerging use

of social media as a marketing tool for fire departments or the misuse of social media on the

personal sites of emergency responders.

      With social media being at the forefront of technology, many resources were obtained

through extensive electronic research using the search engine, www.google.com.   Because of

the quickly growing use of internet technology and social networks for providing means of

online discussion and interaction, many of the sources used in this applied research paper

consisted of electronic documents. As part of the research, the author subscribed to several

social media blogs and websites pertaining to public safety and the private industry. New

information on social media and social networking was received almost daily. This served to

verify that social media is a rapidly growing trend and that new ways to utilize this growing

method of communication are being developed.

      The amount of information pertaining to social media was abundant. Information ranged

from an individual's use of social media to corporate use of social media. Through internet

research, many corporate and municipal social media policies were reviewed on-line or

downloaded for review.   There were variations in the complexity of the social media policies

reviewed and style of policies depending on the background of the developer. Each policy, from

municipal to corporate, was reviewed for content and applicability to the ZFRD. It should be

noted that the majority of the policies evaluated contained the same information and many were

written in similar formats. It was not the intent of the ZFRD to reinvent the wheel when it came

to social media policies, but to develop a plan that would help them succeed in their goal of

providing information and education to the community. Many of the key points from policies

reviewed were utilized in the development of the ZFRD comprehensive social media plan.

First to be determined was the social media sites that were to be used. Criteria utilized to

identify the social media sites most adaptable to the ZFRD's use included ease of distributing the

message, popularity among the community, and the ability to post meaningful content in a

variety of formats. Facebook and Twitter were chosen as the social media platforms to be used

by the ZFRD to inform and educate the public based on the information obtained in the research,

their popularity, and their ability to stream together. This decision was made based on the site's

popularity obtained through research and their current use by other public safety agencies.

Following the action research methodology, two policies were created that would serve as the

initial ZFRD comprehensive social media plan.   The first policy created was the *Social Media*

Plan for Department Sponsored Sites. This policy was developed by identifying social media

key words and their definitions. Next the administrative portion of the policy was developed to

serve as a guide for how the social media sites will be managed. A section on the rights and

responsibilities was created next to guide who will post information, what information can be

posted, and who will monitor the sites for compliance with the policy. Finally, a portion of the

policy was dedicated to general social computing guidelines. This section was designed to

outline some basic facts on the use of social media as an official site for the ZFRD.   A copy of

the *Social Media Plan for Department Sponsored Sites* policy can be found in Appendix A.

Next to be created was a policy titled *Personal Use of Social Media.* It was understood

that many of the members of the ZFRD have personal social media accounts and access them

daily. The intent of this policy was to prevent the posting of ZFRD business on an individual's

personal site. This policy was created by first establishing policy guidelines which outlined what

type of information related to the ZFRD could be posted by an employee on their personal social

media accounts. A section of the policy was developed to outline the rights of the employee

based on first amendment rights and the NLRA. Finally a section was added to delineate

handling violations of this policy. A copy of the *Personal Use of Social Media* policy can be

found in Appendix B.

The last item created as part of the comprehensive social media plan was a press release

to notify the community of our social media sites. For the comprehensive social media plan to

be successful, a gathering of friends and followers must be established. This press release would

be placed on the City of Zion's official website, www.cityofzion.com, under the ZFRD's portion

of the site. A copy of the press release would also be distributed to local print media sources for

placement in newspapers. A copy of the proposed press release can be found in Appendix C.

Several limitations were identified while reviewing prior research and information related

to the adaptation of social media by the fire service. The ZFRD would still need to be a visible

component in the community and must be recognized as an active partner in order to be relied

upon as a trusted source of information on the social media platforms. The ZFRD would need to

spend time making the social network sites apparent to the community to gather a community of

friends and followers to their sites. Because of the diversity of users in the social media world,

the Zion Fire and Rescue Department would have to make certain that information and education

placed on the site it tailored to meet the needs of all users. Additional limitations to the

procedures were that many of the fire service related sources reviewed dealt only with the

emerging use of social media as a marketing tool for fire departments or the misuse of social

media on the personal sites of emergency responders. Few fire service sources were found that

directly related social media as a tool to enhance public education by providing information and

education in non-emergency situations. A final limitation was the vast amount of social media

platforms that are available to use. Social media sites were found for almost every interest group

or topic one could think of. Some sites were very specific to their content and users while others

remained broad in content and users. Social media sites had to be found that could be easily

managed with existing resources while delivering valuable content coinciding with the purpose

of this research.

Results

The results for this applied research project are provided as answers to the research

questions that were provided in the introduction section. The goal was to provide background in

developing a comprehensive social media plan for the ZFRD to assist in informing and educating

the community. By formulating information gathered in the literature review and the through the

procedures, answers to the research questions were obtained which assisted in the development

of the comprehensive social media plan for the ZFRD.

When considering the use of social media by the ZFRD, the first concern are the laws,

rules, and standard operating procedures that relate to the use of social media by the Zion Fire

and Rescue Department. Research did not identify any specific laws or rules directly related to

the placement of information or use of social media. Research did identify many standard

operating procedures created by corporate and municipal agencies that guided their employees in

the use of social media. Laws and rules that could be related to social media use were found to

be referenced in many social media policies. The Federal Trade Commission issued guidelines

on social media practices in 2009, followed by the Financial Regulatory Authority in 2010 and

the Federal Drug Administration was soon to follow (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011).

The Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 severely

restricted the release of information about emergency medical calls, including photos, without

the permission of the patient. The only allowable photos are for treatment purposes where the

paramedic would be allowed to take a picture to show the hospital staff as part of his her report

to emergency room staff. Blackstone (2010) commented on the use of photography when he

stated:

> It is a basic principle of law that anyone may take a photo of anything that is in
>
> a public area. In contrast, the law makes clear that we have a right to privacy
>
> in private places such as our home, a hospital room, or the interior of an
>
> ambulance. The courts limit taking photos in private areas as an intrusion into
>
> a person's privacy. Unwanted photos taken in these private places are
>
> considered to be an invasion of privacy and not allowed without the consent of
>
> the person being photographed. (p. 48)

Firefighters across the nation have been accused of violating confidentiality rules and HIPAA

laws by posting photos and other identifying information on Facebook (DiNolfo, 2011).

The NLRA provides protections to employees while participating in online activities such

as blogging and posting on social media sites. The NLRA allows an employee to post facts and

opinions on their employment as long as it does not cause harm to the employer. As Erickson

(2010) pointed out, many employers do not realize that Section 7 of the NLRA protects the rights

of all employees, regardless of union status, to engage in protected "concerted activities," such as

discussing wages, work conditions, and other terms of employment. An employer may prohibit

conducted that isn't protected under the NLRA. These items include conversations about the (a)

employer's proprietary information, (b) explicit sexual references, (c) criticism of race or

religion, (d) obscenity, profanity and inappropriate language, (e) references to illegal drugs, and

(f) online sharing of confidential intellectual property (Erickson, 2010). As social media policies

were being developed, many employers restricted the use of social media sites by their

employees. As Erickson (2010) pointed out, employers may want to create policies that include

language clarifying that the policy doesn't restrict protected communications under the NLRA.

According to Weber (2009), Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act says "no

provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of

any information provided by another information content provider" (p. 60). As a federal law,

this preempts any state laws to the contrary. According to Ludwig (2010), Section 230 of the

Communications Decency Act absolves all websites from any liability arising from any posting.

Ludwig advises that public safety agencies are taking their employee's postings seriously when

they could affect the operations of their agency. Across the nation, fire departments have

brought disciplinary actions against firefighters for misconduct related to their participation in

social media sites (DiNolfo, 2011).

Consultants suggest that organizations such as fire departments create a social media plan

to ensure the proper use of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn (McGoldrick, 2010). This

point was confirmed my Barszczewski (2011) when he mentioned that a clear social media

policy must be in place to protect the organization. Local governments face a host of legal and

ethical issues when determining whether to maintain a social media page for the entity itself, as

opposed to personal user pages. These issues involve first amendment speech restrictions and

the use of public resources for both employee and business access to public media, open meeting laws, and public records and disclosure issues (Niebur, 2011). DiNolfo (2011) advises that social media policies should reflect the department's interests in protecting its integrity while balancing an employee's rights of free expression and speech. McMenamin suggests that companies should explain to their employees that they have no expectation of privacy in the use of company computers, whether connected to the network or not. This includes times where personal use is allowed (2010).

A solid social media policy establishes guidelines for effective social media presence in the community. Social skills are much more important than technical skills, and a social media policy needs to clearly articulate those intangible, personality specific skills that determine an individual's strength as a team player or a community member (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011). Weber (2009) cautioned that you must think about the rules for participating in the social web as a corporation against the actions of an individual on the web. The establishment of clear policies at the onset will save time and aggravation when a crisis does occur.

The next step in the development of a social media plan was to research what social media systems were available for the ZFRD to use. The literature review found many different types of social media and social networking sites available for use depending on one's interest. The specific social media site used by an individual or organization is dependent on the information they wish to communicate and the types of media they wish to communicate through. Social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook offer a simple platform for individuals to communicate with the public. Automated services are provided for members to connect with other members through a variety of methods.

Social media sites available include (a) Bebo, (b) Facebook, (c) Fastpitch, (d) Friendster, (e) Gather, (f) KickApps, (g) LinkedIn, (h) Moli, (i) MySpace, (j) Ning, (k) Orkut, (l)Plaxo, and (m) many more based on an individual interests (Safko, 2009). According to Nations (n.d.b), the top social networking sites include but are not limited to (a) Facebook, (b) MySpace, (c) Twitter, (d) Ning and (e) LinkedIn. Ning is a social network for creating social networks. Ning takes the idea of groups to a whole new level. The ability to create your own community makes Ning a great home away from home for organizations and groups looking to fill the social void. LinkedIn is a business-oriented social network where members invite people to be "connections" instead of "friends." LinkedIn is a contact management system as well as a social network.

MySpace is a social networking website targeted at a general audience. Launched in 2003, it became one of the most visited websites in the world within a few years. Utilizing a system of adding friends to your network, the ability to customize your profile, write blog entries, play favorite mp3 tracks, join groups, and enter discussions, MySpace allows users to interact in a way unparalleled before its emergence. The most compelling reason to join MySpace is for fun. There are many avenues towards entertainment on MySpace including browsing through musician profiles and exploring areas dedicated to television shows or movies. But MySpace isn't just for fun anymore. Many businesses maintain MySpace profiles in order to use the social media site as a form of marketing. For musicians, actors, authors, entrepreneurs, and others that maintain a public image, a MySpace profile can be a very important connection to fans (Nations, n.d.c).

Founded by Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook was designed as a social networking site for Harvard students. Facebook then spread from Harvard through the university ranks and down into the high schools, before going public in 2006. Facebook allows you to maintain a friends

list and choose privacy settings to tailor who can see what on your profile. Facebook allows you

to upload photos and maintain photo albums that can be shared with your friends. Facebook

supports the ability to comment on your friends "walls" in order to keep in touch or just say 'hi'.

Facebook supports groups and fan pages are allowing businesses to effectively use Facebook as a

vehicle for social media marketing (Nations, n.d.a). Facebook profiles are typically for an

individual's personal use. Facebook groups are like small clubs with administrators having

control over who can join the group. Facebook fan pages function similar to profile pages and

should be the method used to market a company or organization such as the ZFRD. A link to a

company's fan page should be placed on their official website if appropriate (Agresta & Bough,

2011). From a ZFRD standpoint, a drawback to the use of Facebook is that it requires proper

staffing to keep up to speed on a regular basis (Agresta & Bough, 2011).

Twitter started out as a microblogging website and has quickly grown into a social

messaging platform and one of the top social networks in the world. According to Nielsen

Online, unique visitors to Twitter increased 1,382% year over year from 475,000 in February

2008 to 7 million in February 2009. In April 2010, Twitter announced 100 million users (as

cited in Agresta & Bough, 2011).

Twitter is phenomenon that transcends social networking to provide an outlet for news,

trends, buzz, and chat among many other uses. Twitter is deceptively simple, yet a powerful

social networking based communications tool (Mazzarella, 2009). Twitter is known as a great

place for keeping people informed on what you are up to without the need to spend a lot of time

crafting an entire post on the subject, members just say what's up and leave it at that. With the

ability to follow people and have followers, and the ability to interact with Twitter on your cell

phone, Twitter has become the perfect social messaging tool. Twitter is a great tool for quickly

communicating a message to a group of people.   It can be used by a family to keep in touch, a

company to coordinate business, or the media to keep people informed or a writer to build up a

fan base (Nations, n.d.d).

Facebook and Twitter were identified as the most advantageous to use by the ZFRD to

inform and educate the City of Zion. Twitter is always on and available to users in due in part to

the data enabled consumer mobile devices. This makes it a particularly attractive

communications medium (Mazzarella, 2009). Barszczewski (2011) describes Facebook as the

most popular and Twitter as the most interesting. An advantage for the ZFRD is that users that

have accounts on both Twitter and Facebook, can set up messages to be duplicated on each

platform through administrative options.

The next question to be answered was what information can be put on social media to

inform and educate the community? Public safety agencies are only limited by the amount of

time and resources they have to commit to using social media. When the H1N1 flu virus

appeared in US, social networking and social media played a significant role in the early

distribution of information about its transmission, known cases and prevention strategies (Friese,

2009). According to Friese, the CDC's Twitter accounts (@CDCFlu and @CDCemergency)

gave the most rapid and reliable information in regards to H1N1. Short headlines and links to

more details information were given to put the situation into context. Friese also suggest that

users can create a You Tube channel, invite and accept subscribers to it, and interact with

viewers and subscribers who leave text and video comments.

When one has entered the world of social media, it is important to know how to post

messages that will engage your audience. Organizations don't want to post too much, yet they

don't want to post to little. You should post enough to allow the community to remain up to date

with what is going on and to remain engaged (Niebur, 2011). Further, adding links to

information you post can be very beneficial, giving credibility to your message and directing

readers to where they can find more extensive material on the subject.   The addition of pictures

can be a great to capture your audience's attention. The power of the Boston Fire Department's

social networking site was illustrated in the annual campaign to remind people to change their

clock for daylight savings time.

      Many educators rely on people outside the department to assist with public education

(Powell, 1997). Using social networking, educators can get their message out to the public by

having friends reposting messages on their pages. The Boston Fire Department posted the notice

on Facebook and Twitter and had more than 17,000 views, and dozens of fans reposted the

notice to their personal page. The department estimates that the notice was delivered to more

than 50,000 people all from a keyboard, with no additional expense to the department

(McCowen, 2010). Facebook has become a venue for the fire service to post updates on hiring

information, testing dates, links to news articles about the department, apparatus purchases,

community outreach programs, and photos (McCourt, 2010). Barszczewski (2011) suggests

putting fire department success stories, prevention tips, and event and training announcements on

the department's social media page.

      According to Barr et al. (2003) any related programs that decrease the potential for

injury or death should be explored and delivered. Examples of programs and tips that could be

placed on social media include, (a) home escape planning, (b) smoke detectors, (c) burn and

scald, (d) home fire prevention, (e) carbon monoxide, (f) natural disasters, (g) man-made

disasters, (h) children's car seat, (i) fire drills, (j) fire extinguishers, (k) fireworks, (l) hazardous

materials, (m) bicycle safety, (n) stop drop and roll, (o) babysitting, and (p) CPR/AED.

Information to post or repost can be obtained from agencies such as the (a) Federal emergency

Management Agency (FEMA), (b) United States Fire Administration (USFA), (c) State Fire

Marshals, (d) National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), and (e) American Red Cross. The

Center for Disease Control (CDC) has a social media toolkit to help departments get started in

social media. Widgets, online videos and a host of other resources are available to add to

websites ("Social media tools", 2011). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has

developed a toolkit of texts that contain expert approved recommended actions people can take

to protect themselves after a disaster. These text messages are up to 115 characters in length and

designed so that emergency managers can modify them to meet a community's needs (Yeskey,

2011). These messages are available for voluntary use at http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/psa.

When an organization decides to use social media as part of its public education program,

a decision needs to be made on who will be assigned the responsibility of maintaining the site,

who will publish the messages, and how often they will be published. The final research

question asked who would maintain and monitor the use of social media by the ZFRD. It was

clear from the procedures that there should be at least one person assigned to oversee the

Facebook and Twitter social media sites that were chosen to be used by the ZFRD. This

oversight would include what information was to be posted on each social media site and who

could post information to the site.

In addition, this person would also monitor any comments or interaction between the

community and the ZFRD through the social media sites. The logical person to assume this

position would be the public education coordinator for the ZFRD. The public education

coordinator could then delegate the social media site's administrative rights to other ZFRD

employees as it was necessary for maintenance and monitoring of each site's activity. As was

done with the Boston Fire Department, a number of staff members were given administrative

rights to the department's Facebook page and were encouraged to view the site periodically

throughout the day and delete inappropriate postings (McCourt, 2010).

Through regular dissemination of information, news, fire and life safety education tips

the City of Zion will see the ZFRD as a credible and active member of the community. By

allowing interaction from the community to respond to, and comment on this information, the

ZFRD will become a more proactive member of the community. To maintain the ZFRD

Facebook and Twitter sites as credible sources, they will have to be continuously monitored for

inappropriate comments or links to unacceptable sites. These are areas of risk that are taken

when organizations choose to interact with members of the community through open site

(Campion, 2010).

Based on the information evaluated during the literature review, it was clear that the use

of social media to inform and educate the public was a positive direction the ZFRD should seek

out. The results of the information obtained through research indicated that the development of a

social media plan to inform and educate the community was in the best interest of the Zion Fire

and Rescue Department. Through the procedures, a social media plan was developed for the

ZFRD. The components of this comprehensive social media plan are found in Appendix A and

Appendix B of this applied research paper. Appendix C contains a copy of the press release that

will be used to provide notification to the community regarding the initiation of the social media

sites by the ZFRD.

A successful presence by the ZFRD in the social media world will engage the community

to become more aware of their individual risk management techniques. The ZFRD can use

social media to inform and educate the public on fire and life safety tips, events, and incidents

that may affect them as members of the community or surrounding areas. When the community

becomes accustomed to the ZFRD sites and utilizes them regularly to receive information and

education of concern to them, community equity will be achieved.

Discussion

The intent of this applied research paper was to develop a comprehensive social media

plan for the ZFRD. The technology involved in social media is used by members of the ZFRD

on a daily basis while carrying out their job requirements. Many members of the ZFRD use

social media on a daily basis as part of their personal lives, so adapting a plan for use by the

department seemed to be the natural transition to increasing the delivery of information and

education to large audiences with the least amount of staffing. The research conducted for this

project shows that the ZFRD can effectively use social media to inform and educate the City of

Zion's residents, business owners, and visitors. The success of the ZFRD social media will be

dependent on how the community perceives the information placed on each site. Both timely

and relative information will need to be placed on the site for the community to want to visit.

The ZFRD will have to develop a rapport with the community, and it is this rapport that what

will lead to the development of community equity and eventually will lead to the success of the

social media sites. The delivery of proactive information such as fire and life safety tips as well

as ZFRD activities and events is probably the best opportunity for the ZFRD to reach the

community.

Allowing the community, general public and the ZFRD to interact with each other,

provide feedback, and distribute posted information through the use of social media will allow

the ZFRD to become a more influential role model within the City of Zion. As the social media

and social network technology continues to grow in popularity among the corporate world,

consumers will expect government agencies such as the fire service to utilize these services as well. " The technology itself is vital but can only be effective in the right framework—which needs to evolve as new technological tools are becoming available at an amazing pace" (Coyle & Meirer, 2009, p. 12).

The ZFRD needs to become more proactive involving public education for the community than has been done in the past. The use of social media is one way to accomplish this. By developing the proper policies and procedures for using social media within the ZFRD, we can minimize the chance of firefighters posting information detrimental to the department yet provide information that is valuable to the community. Historically, as a society, audiences have received information from television and print media. They accept what they see or read as the truth being distributed only after confirmation of an event was obtained by the reporter. With the internet accessible to many, people will now seek and receive information from multiple sources. Information that is viewed or read is now followed up on to verify or seek out verification. People seek out sources they feel are official or authoritative.

If the public doesn't understand what the fire service does on a day- to- day basis and how we can provide them with a useful service other than the traditional emergency incident, then they will have little value to us in a time we need their support. With social media, you have the ability to meet and talk to people virtually whom you may never connect with in the physical world (Agresta & Bough, 2011). By complementing their public education plan with social media, the ZFRD has a better chance of informing and educating the public. Social media can be used to provide insights to the community and to build an awareness of the ZFRD services. Participation in this way could help forge a more trusted relationship with the community.

Social media can help the fire service educate and inform the public on those activities we do that they do not see such as (a) training, (b) maintenance, (c) fire prevention, and (d) public education. Video clips placed on Facebook or linked to Twitter can help show what we do in ways we previously could not. Social media can also allow public safety organizations to "tell their story" to the public through daily updates and departmental activities (Werner, 2011). Most firefighters and many officers are content with the way things run on a regular basis and do not see a need for change. These firefighters will need to be motivated to become more proactive for a social media program to work. To embrace social media marketing and to be successful, the entire organization has to buy into the program (Singh, 2010). Building a truly engaged community is the key to utilizing social media to educating and informing the community. By failing to use social media as part of the ZFRD's public education program, they will be missing an opportunity to exponentially increase the amount of people who will hear their message.

The leaders of the fire service recognize that social media platforms are a valuable tool to the public relations and public education components of our services. As budgets and resources within fire departments shrink, they must look to the available and cost efficient alternatives to deliver education to the community. Employees must be trusted to converse, communicate and collaborate with each other respectfully and productively. This will be important when trying to energize them for social media (Singh, 2010). The key to successful community participation in social media is to combine information delivery and exchange with entertainment. Most companies feel that employee and company access to social media can only get them in trouble. With this view in mind, an opportunity to reach large amounts of the public will be missed (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011).

It is key for the ZFRD is to utilize the following elements in developing a plan for using social media (a) who do we officially want or need involved in the social media efforts?, (b) where does our intended audience currently gather online?, (c) what are we willing to do to interact with our audience?, (d) why should our audience interact with us?, and (e) how will you interact with the audience? Make guidelines that are basic, clear and easy to follow. If one wouldn't be comfortable saying it in front of their parents, kids or boss, perhaps it shouldn't be put it on social media. Keep private information under wraps by respecting the department's privacy as well as the customers. Perception is reality, be careful of what you say and how you say it. Manage your time online so that it doesn't interfere with your workload. (Fitton et al., 2009). The use of social media as a public relations tool requires an immense amount of work to succeed. A challenge to the use of social media as a tool for public education is that social media is a labor intensive endeavor that requires a lot of human resources to execute and a significant investment of time to do right (Agresta & Bough, 2011). Take it slow and wait for a solid, engaged, relevant network to build up (Fitton et al., 2009).

When a fire department agency has selected its medium, it's important to remain dedicated to it with one to two postings a day being sufficient (Ballum, 2011). Using social media to inform and educate the public is a time consuming activity that requires daily monitoring to make sure the site does not become stale. A Twitter page could be used to alert residents to breaking public safety news, and for specific ZFRD events. Using Facebook, the ZFRD can share documents and messages from other users and or groups. To keep up with everything and make social media part of our daily check-in, the ZFRD must figure out a way to make check in habitual (Agresta & Bough, 2011). Marketing and public education through social media takes discipline to achieve results. Simply logging in and placing messages won't

work (Gillin & Schwartzman, 2011). Agresta and Bough (2011) add that you should have one

person in charge of your social media. Postings made by the ZFRD should be authentic and

human. The ZFRD should try and make a connection to current events and supply quality and

useful content with each posting. Information has to be interesting and entertaining (Ballum,

2011). An advantage for the ZFRD is that the Facebook and Twitter accounts can be set up so

that a posting appears on each simultaneously. This would save time on posting and insure that

all friends and followers have the ability to receive the same information regardless of the social

media they wish to use.

The success of the ZFRD's social media program can be measured by the number of

Facebook fans and Twitter followers accumulated. The fire service nationally is facing the

challenge of reaching out an effective and efficient means of communication to keep residents

informed of important safety information. According to Gillin and Schwartzman, the way to

attract visitors and followers and to make connections, is by providing useful information (2011).

The Boston Fire Department is leading the way through effective use of existing social

networking web sites such as Facebook and Twitter (McCourt, 2010). The Boston Fire

Department has more than 14,000 "fans" and is growing. This gives the department an

opportunity to communicate all the positive things it accomplishes that are not carried by the

local press. Fundraising events, volunteer initiatives, and all the heroic things our firefighters do

on a daily basis are shared with the department's fans, and the department is able to solicit

feedback from its constituents and respond to concerns (McCourt, 2010).

The media chosen to be used by the ZFRD was based partly on the accessibility of

information by the community. Facebook is passive media where one needs a computer to log

into or a smartphone to participate. With Twitter, anyone with a cell phone can receive tweets

via text messaging allowing Twitter to reach a broader mobile audience. Because of the

increased use of smartphones, any social media campaigns should be smartphone ready.

Smartphone cameras improve the ability to quickly take a picture and post it to social media

websites. Since many of the employees of the ZFRD carry smartphones, the ability to keep the

Facebook and Twitter sites active with fresh content is enhanced.

The ability to get information out to the community will be greatly improved with

success on Twitter. Twitter is a great way to connect with large numbers of people quickly and

personally, and is like having a conversation (Fitton et al., 2009). Fitton et al., further discuss

how much faster, more easily, and farther messages spread on Twitter. Sharing and passing

along information is what makes Twitter a sensitive global news detector, a powerful tool for

social change or marketing, and an interesting and dynamic flow of ideas and information.

Spreading information to the community is the reason for using social media. Having the

community continue to spread the word to their friends and followers is the advantage of social

media. With Twitter, most people leave their tweets open to the public, which means anyone

who is interested in what you are saying can follow you. Additionally, people frequently repeat

your tweets for their own followers (Fitton et al., 2009). With more and more people in the

community having the ability to receive messages placed on social media sites quickly and

having the ability to repost these messages, the number of people that can be informed is

unaccountable.

The social media used by the ZFRD should allow the community to learn about the

ZFRD. When creating the social media sites, the ZFRD must spend time too properly set up the

biography section of their account to accurately identify the mission and values of the

department. The page should be reflection of the services provided and the intent of the ZFRD

to provide public education and reduce the risk management to the City of Zion. Fitton et al

(2009) iterate that corporations must be honest and transparent about what they do. Additionally,

employees must be honest and sincere in what is posted on the official ZFRD social media sites.

With the new societal free flow of information sharing, legitimate patient privacy and business

concerns for the public safety employer have a potential to arise (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010). By

having a comprehensive social media plan in place that includes a policy on how the ZFRD will

manage their official social media sites as well as a policy on an employee's use of personal

Facebook accounts, the ZFRD can provide a positive direction to protect themselves from legal

concerns.

Companies do their employees a tremendous disservice by not developing and enforcing

a corporate social media policy (Agresta & Bough, 2011). Employers should not restrict access

to social media sites by their employees. A better solution is to create policies to guide the

proper use of social media sites while at work. Social media sites are become a way of

communication for society and restricting access eliminates a vast source of reference material

from multiple sources. As social media continues to evolve it will change the way the fire

department looks at communication. New recruits coming into the organization will expect to

use the same tools at work that they use at home. Employers who restrict access to Facebook

and other social media sites will find themselves becoming isolated (Gillin & Schwartzman,

2011).

The information obtained while completing this applied research project revealed the true

value social media can provide to society. As technology continues to become further

developed, the ZFRD will need to adjust its social media plan to keep up with the needs of the

community. Research revealed that having a social media plan in place shows that fire

departments are keeping up with the technology used on a daily basis by many to stay informed, and is a progressive means of being an active member of the community.

As times change, the ZFRD must seek out opportunities to engage the City of Zion to the operations and importance of the department. As society adapts to social media as a way of life, the ZFRD must find ways to use social media to develop community equity and gain the trust and respect of the community they serve. Using a social media platform to engage the community and provide a resource for informing and education the community is a necessity. Delivery of public education through social media can enhance the community equity of the ZFRD by providing an information stream that is reliable, timely and proactive in nature and serve as a beneficial method to enhance the distribution of (a) fire and life safety education, (b) community risk reduction initiatives, (c) emergency information, and (d) event information.

Providing the bulk of information and education during Fire Prevention Week each October was not ultimately getting the information out to the City of Zion. Fire Prevention Week was the big push to get the fire and life safety education out through the schools and through an open house.   This endeavor only reached a small population of the community and involved similar information each year. The use of social media year round will be a cost effective method for the ZFRD to reach a larger population and at the same time improve its public image as a community partner. Increasing this public image and improving community equity is a necessity when it comes to gathering support from external sources during budget concerns that may affect or involve the community.

As part of the action research, the development of a comprehensive social media plan to inform and educate the community was created. By implementing the comprehensive social media plan, the ZFRD will better be able to inform and educate the community. Through this

information and education, a positive impact will be made on the community increasing the

community equity of the ZFRD and increasing the risk reduction capabilities of the community.

Recommendations

The research conducted for this applied research project indicated a need to utilize social

media as a method to inform and educate the residents, business owners and visitors of the City

of Zion. The problem was the ZFRD did not have a comprehensive social media plan to inform

and educate the community. Through research, the author has found that social media has

benefited many fire departments across the country both as a means of emergency notification

and as public relations tool. The purpose of this research was to develop a comprehensive social

media plan to inform and educate the community. Facebook and Twitter were chosen by the

author as the two social media sites to utilize. Facebook was chosen because of both its

popularity and its ability to easily allow the posting of messages, photos, and videos. Twitter

was also chosen because of the ability to quickly tweet 140 character messages which could then

be "retweeted" by others essentially allow the message to get to a larger population. Each site

also has the ability to display posts made on either site.

Internet, cell phones, smart phones have all changed the way the society learns and shares

information. It is time the ZFRD seize the opportunity to join this age of information technology

and utilize it to get our message of prevention and information to community. The ZFRD must

show the community that it is able to keep up with current technology and can provide

information they need often before they need it. As seen through this applied research project,

the use of social media to engage the public is a growing trend that should be embraced by the

Zion Fire and Rescue Department and the fire service in general in both times of calm and in

emergencies. An important aspect of the ZFRD's program will have to be to provide regular and

timely updates to the Facebook and Twitter sites. If sites become stagnant, followers will no

longer visit the site and the program will most likely fail.

Efforts will have to be made by the ZFRD to let the public know that they are looking out

for the community's safety and well being. The ZFRD needs to keep the community informed

on how they can keep themselves safe thereby improving risk reduction in the City of Zion. The

biggest obstacle is to show what the ZFRD does and have people understand what it is we do and

why. In order to accomplish this it is the recommendation of the author that the ZFRD establish

a social media program as part of its public education program.

To properly use social media as a form of public education, the ZFRD must create a buy-

in from all employees of the ZFRD. Employees will have to be encouraged and motivated to

participate in the plan by recommending ideas of what can be posted to keep the community

interested and interactive with the Facebook and Twitter sites. To be successful, we have to have

everyone from elected officials to city leaders support the project. Elected officials and city

leaders will need to support and promote the site to create a sense of buy-in for the members of

the department to want to participate in the program.

Because of staffing shortages, the social media program will should be monitored daily

by staff on duty to prevent one person from being overloaded. There will, however, need to be

one person appointed to be in charge of the social media sites to oversee the activity and

effectiveness. The candidate recommended for this position would be the department's public

education officer, who also acts as the department's public information officer. As technology

continues to advance, social networking will most likely change to keep up with these

advancements. The public information officer, in cooperation with administrative staff, will

need to continuously monitor the changing technology to ensure that the ZFRD is taking full

advantage of what social media has to offer the department and in turn the community.

Social media sites, the internet, and smartphones have changed the way we get our

information. In addition, smartphones and social media sites have changed the way society

shares information. It is now possible to spread a single message to literally 1000's of people

through the use of social networks. Meeting the information needs of the City of Zion before the

onset of an emergency and preventing emergencies through information and education is an

important way to develop community equity. It is the hope that the use of social media sites will

increase the positive image, increased public relations and increased public education we have

needed.

The author, through action research, developed a plan to use social media to inform and

educate the community. Social media has been proven successful by both private organizations

and public safety entities as a valuable method of distributing a message to large groups of the

population. By using social media as a tool to enhance the public education and public relations

of the ZFRD, messages can be delivered to the community improving the risk reduction

capabilities of the department. Through the natural progression of social media, this message

could be spread further by the use of individual networks of friends.

The use of social media to inform and educate the residents of the City of Zion as well as

other members who wish to receive the messages, will be an important step forward for the

ZFRD. The ZFRD will need to be diligent in monitoring the amount and reliability of the

information being posted on the sites. If the ZFRD wants to gain the community's respect of a

valuable asset, it will need to make sure the social media sites do not become a forgotten medium

of communication. Traditional forms of media, such as word of mouth and the City's website,

will need to promote the ZFRD's social media sites in order for the community to become

familiar with the sites and to start using them as a source of information and education.   Links to

the ZFRD sites can be placed on the official City website using the Facebook and Twitter icons.

Additionally, it is recommended that a QR code (abbreviated from Quick Response code) be

placed on pamphlets, public education materials, department letterhead and possibly even the

apparatus. These QR symbols are a specific matrix barcode that is readable by dedicated QR

barcode readers, camera telephones, and to a less common extent, computers with webcams.

These QR codes are commonly used by private industry as a link to more information for their

product.

       The intent of the research for this project was to develop a comprehensive social media

plan for the ZFRD to inform and educate the community. The research identified the various

types of social media available today and how they are being used by society as a form of

communication for both individuals and organizations. As part of the research a comprehensive

was created through the creation of policies. It is recommended that the ZFRD implement this

plan to further increase community equity and reduce the risk to the community by disseminating

regular information and education through the growing use of social media networks.   It is

further recommended that the Zion Fire and Rescue Department utilize the social media

platforms Facebook and Twitter as their means to deliver this information and education. The

comprehensive social media plan, Facebook and Twitter sites should be initiated no later than in

October 17, 2011.

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Appendix A

Social Media Plan for Department Sponsored Sites

	Zion Fire and Rescue Department **Standard Operating Policies and Procedures**	Policy: COMMUNICATIONS 707
		Number of pages: 5
		Effective Date:
		Revision Date:

Subject: **Social Media Plan for Department Sponsored Sites**

Purpose: To address the fast-changing landscape of the Internet and the way residents communicate and obtain information online, Zion Fire and Rescue Department will use social media tools to reach a broader audience. The Zion Fire and Rescue Department encourages the use of social media to further the goals of the department and meet the mission and vision of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department.

Scope: All members of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department shall follow this policy.

DEFINITIONS

Social Media (and Web 2.0) – Umbrella terms that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and content creation. Social media uses the "wisdom of crowds" to connect information in a collaborative manner online. Through social media, individuals or collaborations of individuals create web content, organize content, edit or comment on content, combine content, and share content. These take on various forms of discussion, including social networks, blogs, video sharing, podcasts, wikis, message boards, and online forums. Technologies include: RSS and other syndicated web feeds, picture sharing, wall postings, fan pages, email, instant messaging, and music sharing. Examples of social media applications include, but are not limited to, Google and Yahoo Groups (reference, social networking), Wikipedia (reference), MySpace (social networking), Facebook (social networking), YouTube (social networking and video sharing), Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (social networking and microblogging), LinkedIn (business networking), and new media comment sharing/blogging.

Social Networking – The practice of expanding business and/or social contacts by making connections through Web-based applications. This policy focuses on social networking as it relates to the delivery of information and education as part of the public education program for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department.

Twitter – A social networking and messaging service that enables its users to send and read messages known as "tweets." Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page and delivered to the author's subscribers who are known as "followers." Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends, or, by default, allow open access. Users can send and receive tweets via the Twitter website, Short Message Service (SMS) with their cell phone or external applications. While the service itself costs nothing to use, accessing it through SMS may incur phone service provider fees. Due to constraints of message length with Twitter, posts must be short, to the point, and can include a link to a webpage that has more information. It is more like creating a headline for a story. With the millions of tweets that are posted every day, it is also important that the message is timely. Posts should contain information about something that is either happening or going to happen in the near future. Twitter can be used to post things such as events, sudden road closures, and incident information.

Facebook – A social networking website. Users can add friends, send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. It is a popular website for reconnecting with friends and family. It is also a place for people with common interests to find each other. Additionally, users can join networks organized by a city, workplace, school, or college. These "fan" pages are followed by people to see what the entity is up to and learn more about them. Posts are made to the "wall" and there is also a place for photos. Many people can now access Facebook with their cell phone. Facebook is a free service. Facebook posts have a larger limit than Twitter, but should be kept short and succinct. Facebook can be used for things such as events, programs, fire and life safety tips, and photos of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department activities. A link to a website that contains more information can be included with a post. There can be overlap between Facebook and Twitter and often the same post can be made to each service.

	Zion Fire and Rescue Department **Standard Operating Policies and Procedures**	Policy: COMMUNICATIONS 707
		Number of pages: 5
		Effective Date:
		Revision Date:

POLICY

A. Administration

1. All Zion Fire and Rescue Department social media sites will be administered by the department's Public Education Coordinator. These social media sites shall be used for the purpose of informing and educating the public in areas related to risk management, services, and events. The Public Education Coordinator may designate members of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department staff to monitor and administer the social media sites.

2. The City of Zion website, www.CityofZion.com, will remain as the City's official location for content regarding the Zion Fire and Rescue Department. Whenever possible, links within social media formats should direct users back to the City's website for more information, forms, documents, or online services necessary. Links will also be placed on the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's page on the City's website linking to the social media sites.

3. The Zion Fire and Rescue Department's employees shall not disclose information about confidential City of Zion business on either the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's social media sites or their personal social media sites. In addition, all use of social media sites by employees shall be in compliance with Illinois' open meeting laws. Employee's posts are a reflection of their own views and not necessarily those of the City of Zion.

4. All official social media postings by the Zion Fire and Rescue Department will be done solely on the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's social media sites or in response to postings made on the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's social media sites. Approved sites and material include:

   a. Facebook – Approved content may be posted on Facebook for promotional purposes. Content may consist of static text, photos, and videos maintained by the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's staff. ***Note: Due to their security risk, Facebook applications are required to be disabled.***

   b. Twitter – Authorized content, such as late-breaking news and minute-by-minute updates, may be made on Twitter. This site also may be used to inform the community about public safety, traffic issues, public information, and other relevant fire department business and activities.

   c. The Public Education Coordinator will track and monitor the social media sites as they relate to the Zion Fire and Rescue Department. In the event that erroneous information is found on the sites, the Public Education Coordinator has the authority to post factual information to correct any errors. Any such postings must be communicated to the Fire Chief and, when necessary, reviewed with the City of Zion Attorney.

5. Communications division procedures are administered by:

   a. The Public Education Coordinator or designee will be responsible for responding to comments and messages as appropriate.

   b. The Zion Fire and Rescue Department may invite others to participate in its social media sites. Such invitations will be based upon the best interests of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department as determined by the Public Education Coordinator.

6. Employee requests for posting to social media sites shall go through the Public Education Coordinator or designee who will determine if a request is appropriate and adheres to the guidelines of this policy. If a request is not within policy guidelines, the request will be denied.

Zion Fire and Rescue Department Standard Operating Policies and Procedures	Policy: COMMUNICATIONS 707
	Number of pages: 5
	Effective Date:
	Revision Date:

7. All content posted on the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's social media sites must comply with the City of Zion web standards, unless otherwise agreed upon between the Fire Chief, the Mayor, and the IT director. Employees', City of Zion, and individual's confidentiality shall be maintained in accordance with all applicable laws and policies. If a question arises regarding the use or posting of confidential information on a social media site, the matter shall be referred to the City of Zion Attorney for review. The information in question shall not be posted; or if already posted, shall be removed until an opinion is rendered by the City of Zion Attorney.

8. All social media-based services to be developed, designed, managed by, or purchased from any third-party source for use requires appropriate budget authority and approval from the IT director. The requesting department will be responsible for all costs related to the purchase, maintenance, and support of third-party products.

9. IT will work with the Public Education Coordinator to ensure that new social networking sites and proposed content meet the City of Zion standards. If approved, the IT Director will allow open internet access to the applicable social media site for the Public Education Coordinator and designee(s).

B.   Rights and Responsibilities

1. It is the responsibility of the employees of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department to understand the procedures as outlined in this policy.

2. Designated staff for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department social media sites will be trained regarding the terms of this policy, including their responsibilities to review content submitted for posting to ensure compliance with the policy.

3. Employees who are not designated by the Public Education Coordinator to access social media sites for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department business are prohibited from posting to social media sites in a capacity reflecting the department. While at work, employees may use computing devices and web accounts to access social media sites only during non-working hours such as lunch periods and breaks.

4. The Public Education Coordinator will monitor a social media committee consisting of the officers of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department. The committee will meet at least every six (6) months to update and review policies and make recommendations regarding current trends and potential impacts of the social media as a valid method of public education.

5. Postings and comments to the Zion Fire and Rescue Department social media sites containing any of the following forms of content will not be allowed:

   a. Comments not topically related to the administrator's posting.

   b. Content that violates the City of Zion's policy including abusive, harassing, intimidating, vulgar, obscene, offensive communications, communications that defame or libel others, and communications that infringe upon the privacy rights of others.

   c. Disparaging communications or jokes that are based on race, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, or any other characteristic protected under federal, state, or local law.

   d. Communications of any copyrighted materials, trade secrets, proprietary information, or any other highly sensitive confidential information.

	Zion Fire and Rescue Department *Standard Operating Policies and Procedures*	Policy: COMMUNICATIONS 707
		Number of pages: 5
		Effective Date:
		Revision Date:

    e.   Solicitation of others for commercial ventures or religious, social, or political causes.

    f.   Content that is in violation of the City of Zion's internet use policy.

6.   The Zion Fire and Rescue Department reserves the right to remove content that is deemed in violation of this policy or any applicable law. Any participants on the Zion Fire and Rescue Department social media sites who are in continual violation of the posting/commenting guidelines may be permanently removed from the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's site.

7.   The Zion Fire and Rescue Department will only post photos and videos for which it has copyright or owner's permission to use.

8.   Direct messages sent to social media accounts will be treated as general correspondence and kept in accordance with retention schedules provided by the State of Illinois and Archives Records Management Division.

9.   Chat functions in any social media sites will not be used.

10. Links to all social media networks to which the Zion Fire and Rescue Department belongs will be listed on the City of Zion's official website.

11. The Zion Fire and Rescue Department reserves the right to temporarily or permanently suspend access to social media sites at any time.

C.   General Social Computing Guidelines

1.   The responsibility is yours. The Zion Fire and Rescue Department employees are personally responsible for the content they publish on blogs, wikis, or any other form of user-generated media. Be mindful that what you publish may be public for a long time.

2.   Do not write anonymously. If you comment publicly about any issue in which you are engaged in your capacity as a Zion Fire and Rescue Department employee, even loosely, you must make your status as a Zion Fire and Rescue Department employee clear. You should also be clear about whether, in such commentary, you are speaking for yourself (most often) or if you are speaking in an official capacity for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department. Write in the first person. Make it very clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the City of Zion or the Zion Fire and Rescue Department. Use a disclaimer if appropriate such as "The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the City of Zion's positions, strategies, or opinions."

3.   Be respectful. Whether in the actual or a virtual world, your interactions and discourse should be respectful. If you identify yourself as a Zion Fire and Rescue Department employee, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and clients. This includes your avatar – dress business professional.

4.   Write what you know. The best way to be interesting, stay out of trouble, and have fun is to write about what you know. If you have a deep understanding of public procurement or building code, it is hard to get into too much trouble writing about that. On the other hand, a purchasing specialist who publishes rants on land use plans or transit corridors has a good chance of being embarrassed by a real expert, or of being boring.

	Policy: COMMUNICATIONS 707
Zion Fire and Rescue Department *Standard Operating Policies and Procedures*	Number of pages: 5
	Effective Date:
	Revision Date:

5. Ask permission and do not tell secrets. Do not provide the Zion Fire and Rescue Department or another's confidential or other proprietary information. Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal to the Zion Fire and Rescue Department. Think before you share. Although we are a public entity, providing specifics on the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's technical environment or utility architecture, for example, introduces risk and exposure to an eager cyber audience and potentially exposes information that would not normally be publicly distributed.

6. Other people's information. It is simple – other people's information belongs to them (be it intellectual property or personal information). It is their choice whether to share their material with the world, not yours. So, before posting someone else's material, check with the owner for permission to do this.

7. Respect your audience and try to add value. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. The City of Zion is best represented by its people and what you publish may reflect on the City of Zion. It is a two-way street. If you are going to write, look around and do some reading first so you learn where the conversation is and what people are saying. Remember the web is all about links; when you see something interesting and relevant, link to it; you will be doing your readers a service and you will also generate links back to you; a win-win.

8. Quality matters. Use a spellchecker. If you are not design-oriented, ask someone who is and take their advice on how to improve. You do not have to be a great or even a good writer to succeed at this but you do have to make an effort to be clear, complete, and concise. There are very few first drafts that cannot be shortened and improved in the process.

9. Think about consequences. The worst thing that can happen as we develop these community relationships is a citizen, a new reporter, or a peer reading aloud to Council about something you have posted that says, "This person or department at the City of Zion hasn't a clue!" In general "City of Zion hasn't a clue" is not only risky but also unsubtle. Once again, it is all about judgment. Using your public voice to trash or embarrass the City of Zion, our customers, your co-workers, or yourself is not only dangerous, but also not very smart.

By the order of the Fire Chief: ___John Lewis_____

Appendix B

Personal Use of Social Media

	Zion Fire and Rescue Department *Standard Operating Policies and Procedures*	Policy: COMMUNICATIONS 708
		Number of pages: 3
		Effective Date:
		Revision Date:

Subject: **Personal Use of Social Media**

Purpose: To establish guidelines with respect to the use of personal web pages, internet postings, and social networking websites by the Zion Fire and Rescue Department. The proper functioning of any fire service agency relies upon the public's confidence and trust in the individual firefighters and the agency to provide effective fire protection and emergency services.

Scope: All members of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department shall follow this policy.

POLICY

A.   **Policy Guidelines**

1.   Employees who have personal web pages, memberships with social networking websites, or other types on internet postings that can be accessed by the public, shall not identify themselves directly or indirectly as a spokesperson for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department or the City of Zion.

2.   Photographs or other depictions of department uniforms, patches, badges, fire trucks, or any other item or material which is identifiable to this department shall not be used on employee internet postings without the permission of the Fire Chief.

3.   Use a disclaimer and write in the first person. Make it clear you are speaking for yourself and not for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and City of Zion. Employees do not have authorization to speak on behalf of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and City of Zion unless the Fire Chief specifically grants permission. As a result, employees are not permitted to identify or disclose that they are an employee of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and City of Zion when sharing their opinions about the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and City of Zion related matters unless the employee has received prior authorization. Information shared via social media is the opinion of the writer only – not the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and City of Zion – and this should be communicated to recipients of the information.

4.   Employees must identify themselves and may not offer opinions regarding the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and the City of Zion anonymously. Use a personal email address, not your City of Zion address, as your primary means of identification.

5.   Be aware of your role in representing the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and City of Zion in online networks. If readers are aware of your identity as a Zion Fire and Rescue Department/City of Zion employee, be careful how you present yourself to colleagues, customers, competitors, and the general public. Be sensitive to the fact that any comments on a website or social network are public. They are immediately searchable and accessible by others and are subject to being republished on other social networks or to the media. Be aware that libel, defamation, HIPAA, and date protection laws apply to your activities.

6.   If someone from the media or press contacts a Zion Fire and Rescue Department employee about posts made in online forums that relate to the Zion Fire and Rescue Department in any way, the employee shall contact the Fire Chief before responding.

	Zion Fire and Rescue Department *Standard Operating Policies and Procedures*	Policy: COMMUNICATIONS 708
		Number of pages: 3
		Effective Date:
		Revision Date:

7. Respect the Zion Fire and Rescue Department policy on Confidential Information and HIPAA regulations. Do not give out confidential, patient, or customer information. This applies whether the employee is posting to their personal site or commenting on other sites.

8. It is the Zion Fire and Rescue Department's policy that employees use the City of Zion computers, including email and the internet, exclusively for department-related business. Employees are not permitted to use the City of Zion computers for personal communications, including social networking, during normal working hours. Employees have the privilege of using City of Zion computers for personal use after working hours as long as not to disrupt the operations of the department.

9. Employees are prohibited from posting or in any other way broadcasting or disseminating information via the internet, social networking sites, or other form of communication the business of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and City of Zion including, but not limited to, the following:

   a. Photographs/images related to any emergency response or other activity conducted by this department.

   b. Video or audio files related to any emergency response or other activity conducted by this department.

   c. Any other information related to an emergency response or other activity conducted by this department.

   d. Any sexual, violent, racial, or ethnically derogatory material including comments, pictures, artwork, videos, or other such inappropriate references.

   e. Any material that brings discredit to or may adversely affect the efficiency or integrity of the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and City of Zion.

B.   Employee Rights

1. This policy is aware of public employee free speech rights. This policy is properly construed when public free speech rights are not improperly abridged by its terms. Individual employees are responsible for evaluating their prospective speech for compatibility and reconciliation with prevailing 1st Amendment jurisprudential thresholds.

2. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruled on 02/07/11 workers negative comments are protected under federal labor laws. Under the National Labor Relations Act, employees may discuss the terms and conditions of their employment with coworkers and others. However, it does warn that it does not give employees free rein to discuss anything work-related on social media. One example they gave of things prohibited are the disclosure of truly confidential information.

	Policy: COMMUNICATIONS 708
Zion Fire and Rescue Department *Standard Operating Policies and Procedures*	Number of pages: 3
	Effective Date:
	Revision Date:

C. **Violations**

    1. Reporting violations:

        a. Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or of any website or webpage in violation of the provision of this policy shall notify his or her Shift Commander immediately for follow-up action.

    2. Violation of this social media policy will result in discipline in accordance with the disciplinary procedure for the Zion Fire and Rescue Department and the collective bargaining agreement in effect at the time of occurrence.
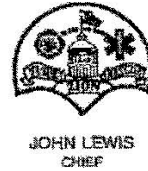
By the order of the Fire Chief: _John Lewis_

Appendix C

Press Release

City of Zion

FIRE & RESCUE DEPARTMENT
1303 27th STREET
ZION, ILLINOIS 60099
(847) 746-4040
(847) 746-4035 "FAX"

"Historic Past - Dynamic Future"

JOHN LEWIS
CHIEF

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 17, 2011

CONTACT:
Lieutenant Justin Stried, Public Education Coordinator
Phone: (847) 746-4036

TOPIC:
Zion Fire and Rescue Department Launches Social Media Sites

DETAILS:
The Zion Fire and Rescue Department has established a presence in social media to promote public education in the areas of risk management for the community. We have created a Facebook Page and Twitter account to allow us to disseminate information and education to the community and to keep them aware of the fire department's events, activities and responses within the City of Zion.

The Zion Fire Department sees this as an excellent way to reach into the community and interact with the public in ways we could never accomplish before. The use of social media will allow us to reach a larger population than we could using our traditional methods of providing fire prevention and life saving tips.

We encourage citizens to visit these sites and become fans of our Facebook page and to follow us on Twitter. The Zion Fire and Rescue Department hopes that by using social media to reach into our community we can reduce the overall risk to our residents and increase the partnership between the residents and businesses of the city of Zion and the Zion Fire and Rescue Department.

Press Release prepared by: John Lewis, Fire Chief